

The Shire & Notting Hill¹

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As writers and theorists of fantasy, as English Catholic authors, as lovers of books, beer and argument, G.K. Chesterton and J.R.R. Tolkien can seem to be suited with clothes cut from the same bolt, although Chesterton would have required quite a few more yards.

Yet they are unlike as much as like. Chesterton came from prosperity; Tolkien from near-poverty. Chesterton's family was comfortably bourgeois; Tolkien was the orphan of a bank manager. Chesterton was no scholar; Tolkien always was. Chesterton was a famous journalist whose fame came early; Tolkien was a little-known Oxford don till fame came late.

Significantly, both men were gifted visual artists from an early age. Their juvenile art is prodigal, and each was his own best illustrator. Perhaps that accounts for the vivid descriptive detail featured in their best writing.

Both were successful with popular readers, perhaps more so that with the so-called intelligentsia.

While Tolkien certainly read – indeed, reportedly memorized – some of Chesterton's vast corpus, Chesterton could not have repaid the compliment. He died in the summer of 1936, when Tolkien was revising and completing *The Hobbit*, which was published in 1937. It is an appealing vanity to say that Chesterton would have liked that book, for its songs, its warfare, and the littleness of its hero all seem to ring true to the Chestertonian chord.

One can also argue that Tolkien fulfils many of "The Ethics of Elfland"'s mandates for a moral philosophy of story in his works, most perfectly in his masterpiece sequel to *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*.

So The Shire of Tolkien and the Notting Hill of Chesterton and the stories that take place in them are at once near neighbours and far removed.

Both realms are unmistakably English, but the former is the rural England of the Shires and the latter the congested heart of London.

Both evoke an era untrammelled by the curse of the Machine, when the sword, the bow, the pike, and the axe were the tools of war. But in Tolkien, the war is a necessity that ends in heroism, whereas in Chesterton, the wars are follies born of royal whim that end in tragedy.

Both wars determine the fates of kings. But Tolkien's Aragorn is a true King, descended from the long line of Elendil, whereas Adam Wayne, the warrior-king figure, is a ruler of a realm because of the caprice of a cynical prankster, the "true" King Auberon Quin, himself proclaimed king by arbitrary fiat, no more a prince than Mark Twain's Tom Canty and perhaps even less suited for the throne. Auberon's rule was, in many ways, an irresponsible disaster. Aragorn's would not be.

Both writers are generally viewed as conservatives, yet they write powerfully of rebellion here and elsewhere; thus both are that seeming oxymoron, the radical conservative. The independence of the Shire from not only the rule but the presence of the King is the whole point of the long-unpublished epilogue chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*, found in Marquette University's library archives, and now printed in *Sauron Defeated*². In both Notting Hill and the Shire, local rule with the approving consent of the King who would otherwise govern the "rebels" is the remarkable conclusion.

Both works champion "Little England": "A man chooses to have an emotion about the largeness of the world' why should he not choose to have an emotion about its smallness?" Chesterton wrote a few years later *Napoleon of Notting Hill* had glorified that emotion. Tolkien concurred, and *The Lord of the Rings* is an anthem seconding that emotion and the common man, or hobbit, as it may be, who harbours it. Though events move the hobbits far from their native Shire, its simple life is the beginning and the end, the heart and soul, of the quest of the Fellowship. Homecoming is the whole

¹ First presented at the Midwestern Chesterton Society, 28 June 1996, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

² The version on pp. 114-119 of *Sauron Defeated* is close to, but not identical to, the Marquette chapter. The differences are primarily linguistic.

point of journeying. The last words of the book are, "Well, I'm back."

Tolkien and Chesterton can also be seen as two of England's great Catholic writers. In *Fantasy, The Bomb and the Greening of England*, Meredith Veldman argues eloquently that Tolkien and his fellow Inkling C.S. Lewis are also authors in a continuing tradition of Romantic protest that also includes Chesterton.

She writes:

At the core of Chesterton's beliefs rested his faith in the common man... [his] political views led him to embrace Christianity, eventually as a Roman Catholic, because he believed that the Christian world taught the essential sacredness of every human being and the goodness of the world of everyday experience... [He] insisted that human beings had to look to the past for alternatives to industrial capitalism.

(Veldman, 1982, pp. 32-33)

One can certainly see, as Dr. Veldman does, how Tolkien's work continues that tradition.

Both men were converts to Roman Catholicism, but one as a boy and the other as a middle-aged man. Tolkien was baptized at age 8 in 1900 along with his widowed mother and younger brother. Throughout his life he was devout and devoted. A letter to a Jesuit priest, Fr. Robert Murray, assures him that:

The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work, unconsciously at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in , or have cut out, practically all references to 'religion' ... the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism,

(Tolkien, 1981, p. 172)

Tolkien certainly practised this odd oxymoronic practice as preached. Only at one well-hidden point in Appendix B dealing with dates can a link to Christianity be seen in *The Lord of the Rings*, however evanescently: "December 25: The Company of the Ring leaves Rivendell at dusk." (Tolkien, 1965b, p. 373)

In a rare note to himself in an early holograph draft page of the events leading up to the departure of

the Fellowship, Tolkien uncharacteristically writes this self-direction: "They must leave Rivendell Dec. 25"³ This underscores the significance of that date.

The Quest of that Company is fulfilled three months later on March 25, a date medieval chroniclers had fixed as that of the original Good Friday (Zemler-Cizewski, 1992). It is a Sunday in Tolkien's tale, when evil is vanquished and a new age begins: Easter in Middle-earth (Beare, 1983).

While the link between the Fellowship's redemptive journey and Christ's is here semi-explicit, the Marquette manuscripts show that a reference to Elrond of Rivendell as "kindly as Christmas" was deleted from *The Hobbit*.

So Tolkien hid his religion in his fiction, perhaps as a prudent English Catholic or an author wary of pigeon holes should. Yet he assures us it is there.

In contrast, Chesterton came to Catholicism in middle age "only after a long intellectual struggle as an adult in his thirties," in Thomas M. Egan's phrase (1983, p. 45). After his conversion at age 48 in 1922, little of Chesterton's religion was "subsumed" in his writing: it is more often explicit. But *Napoleon of Notting Hill* predates that conversion by 18 years. Searching it for Catholic traces is moot. Indeed, it is possibly Chesterton's least religious work.

Comparing the two writers in the September, 1982 issue of *VII*, Egan wrote:

Both felt the sharp loneliness of their religious situations in a non-Catholic, often hostile, English culture. Both were fervent believers. Without being fanatics, both felt that their Catholicism should form the basis of their total life. Chesterton's works all testify to this...

Tolkien's position is more complex. He believed, in common with Chesterton, that the enemies of ordinary decent life were the enemies of the Faith... Both saw the West as a marred and hidden Christianity of independent nations. In both, religious enthusiasm was mingled with a fierce local patriotism, a pride in ethnic heritage. Both loved the "little England" of rustic shires, small towns, with their eccentric customs and laws, their sense of propriety, their lack of ideology, their loyalty

³Tolkien, Series 3, Box3, Folder 8, p. 27B, mss. from Ch. 3 of Book II "The Ring Goes South"; Marquette University Libraries, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, J.R.R. Tolkien Collection; available for viewing at Marquette as Slide #5 "Dec. 25th note. Caradhras" of a series of slides of Marquette mss. pages created by Charles Elston to illustrate my 1987 paper "In The Ring-Maker's Hand: How J.R.R. Tolkien Revised the Manuscript of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* presented at the Mythopoeic Conference in Milwaukee. © The Tolkien Trust 1997.

and love of hearth and home. In all this both saw moral and religious values deeply embedded... Yet Tolkien could not bring himself to undertake the kind of public apologetics in which Chesterton constantly indulged.

(Egan, 1983, p. 45)

“The sharp loneliness” Egan notes seems especially true of Tolkien. After Mabel Tolkien’s swift death of diabetes in 1904, when Tolkien was 12, he believed his ‘own dear mother to be a martyr indeed,’ as he wrote in a letter nine years later, adding ‘and it is not to everyone that God grants so easy a way to his great gifts as he did to Hilary and myself, giving us a mother who killed herself with labour and trouble to ensure us keeping the faith’ (Tolkien, 1981, p. 31).

Mrs. Tolkien’s conversion had alienated some family members; Tolkien’s guardian from her death until his majority in 1913 was a priest, Fr. Francis Morgan. Tolkien would always take his faith most seriously.

Adam Schwartz (1996) wrote of the role of religion in Chesterton’s and Tolkien’s work that:

what both found compelling about Roman Catholicism was what they deemed its resolute defiance of modernity, as well as common conceptions of fantasy, for both championed it against realist and modernist literature precisely because they thought it upholds the norms that they saw threatened by contemporary life and letters... Each one’s faith shaped his intellectual vision... expressed [in their works by] Tolkien more subtly, Chesterton much more overtly, yet both were clearly committed to a Christian (and Catholic Christian) criticism of life.

As noted before, Tolkien certainly read some Chesterton: *Orthodoxy* and *Outline of Sanity* show up in his letters and in “On Fairy Stories”, his longer version of “Ethics of Elfland”. *The Ballad of the White Horse* turns up in this 1994 letter to son Christopher:

P[iscilla, the youngest Tolkien] has been wading through *The Ballad Of The White Horse* for the last many nights; and my efforts to explain the obscurer parts to her convince me that it is not as good as I thought. The ending is absurd. The brilliant smash and glitter of the words and phrases (when they come off, and are not mere loud colours)

cannot disguise the fact that G.K.C. knew nothing about the ‘North’, heathen or Christian. (Tolkien, 1981, p. 92)

Tolkien would attempt his own version of that ballad of the North with his own King of The White Horse, Théoden, and the poetry of Théoden’s realm, Rohan, can be seen as Tolkien’s view of how such English heroic verse, here spoken by Éomer, should read:

*Out of doubt, out of dark to the day’s rising
I came in the sun, sword unsheathing.
To hope’s end I rode and to heart’s breaking
Now for wrath, now for ruin and a red nightfall!*
(Tolkien, 1965b, p. 122)

I wrote to George Sayer, a friend of Tolkien and C.S. Lewis and moreover Lewis’ best biographer, asking if he recalled anything Tolkien had said about Chesterton. That “most unselfish man” (as Lewis describes Sayer in his *Letters* (p. 446)) responded generously that he could not think of anything but invited us to lunch during our English visit on 29 May 1996; he wrote, “my memories will revive.”

Indeed they did. Before a convivial dinner in his Malvern home, Sayer first said he could be of no aid; he could not recall anything Tolkien had said of or about Chesterton. “I’m afraid I rather brought you here under false pretences,” he said.

This was not atypical of Tolkien, who was much less likely to praise other writers than C.S. Lewis. Lewis, Sayer noted, “admired Chesterton immensely and often spoke of him. He owed a great deal to *Orthodoxy* and *The Everlasting Man*. He thought there was some great poetry (1996).

So, maybe, did Tolkien. For Mr. Sayer’s revived memory recalled that Tolkien delighted in and knew by heart a number of poems from *The Flying Inn*, including “The Song of the Quoodle”, “The Song Against Grocers”, and “The reeling English drunkard made the rolling English road”, whose refrain Mr Sayer and I chanted in unison: “The reeling English drunkard made the rolling English road.” Tolkien also was fond of reciting “Lepanto”, Mr. Sayer added.

Mr. Sayer’s sudden recollection was more than a twopenny epiphany: poetry plays an integral part in both Tolkien’s hobbit tales and *The Flying Inn*. Bilbo Baggins and Adam Wayne are both poets. Those who hear echoes of Chesterton in Tolkien’s poetry may not be hearing things. Bilbo’s bath-song sung by Pippin at Crickhollow, for instance, could have been penned by Gilbert as easily as Ronald:

*Sing hey! for the bath at close of day
That washes the weary mud away!
A loon is he that will not sing:
O! Water Hot is a noble thing!*

...

*O! Water cold we may pour at need
down a thirsty throat and be glad indeed;
but better is Beer, if drink we lack,
and Water Hot poured down the back.*
(Tolkien, 1965a, p. 111)

Before our Oxford visit, I had also written to Priscilla Tolkien asking her to please recall what she could of her father's reading of Chesterton.

Wrote Miss Tolkien (1996):

"... I can at least confirm that my father greatly admired G.K. Chesterton and from my memory he had copies of 'The Ballad of the White Horse', 'The Man Who Was Thursday', 'Orthodoxy', and 'In Coloured Lands' in his library. I also remember his introducing me to 'The Battle of Lepanto'.

The last story in the collection *In coloured lands*, "Homesick At Home" is the six-page tale of White Wynd, who leaves his Shire-like home in the White Farmhouse to wander the world. Alas, his journey begins in bitterness, laziness and anger at his wife and children, not in a sacrificial quest to save his homeland. He seems to go mad and leaves his home in a quest for home. His quest transforms him: "It seemed that God had bent back his head by the hair and kissed him on the forehead" (p. 235)

So he sees the whole wide world in the fellowship of vagabonds, sailors, workmen, fishermen, and suddenly he wearies and longs for the White Farmhouse by the river. The story ends with his return:

It was his home now. But it could not be his home till he had gone out from it and returned to it. Now he was the Prodigal Son.

He came out of the pinewood and across the road. He surmounted the low wall and tramped through the orchard, through the kitchen garden, past the cattle-sheds. And in the stony courtyard he saw his wife drawing water. (p. 238)

Were his first words to her, "Well, I'm back."? To this reader, the last paragraph of this short tale seems to pre-echo the last paragraph of Tolkien's long tale.

But let us leave the fantasy fiction of these two writers to picnic briefly in their fantasy non-fiction. As noted earlier, some of the lumber in Tolkien's

notable "On Fairy Stories" lecture delivered at St. Andrews's University on 8 March 1939 was first hewed by Chesterton in his "Ethics of Elfland" in 1908. This is one of Chesterton's finest essays. Tolkien may have shared my admiration.

In "On Fairy Stories" he also quotes from *In Coloured Lands* approvingly "For children are innocent and love justice: while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy." (Tolkien, 1980, p.152).

And again, from *The Outline of Sanity* "Long ago Chesterton truly remarked that, as soon as he heard that anything had "come to stay," he knew that it would very soon be replaced – indeed regarded as pitifully obsolete and shabby." (Tolkien, 1980, p. 169).

A third allusion both praises and quibbles:

Of course, fairy stories are not the only prophylactic against loss. Humility is enough. And there is (especially for the humble) *Mooreeffoc*, or Chestertonian Fantasy. *Mooreeffoc* is a fantastic word, but it can be seen written up on every town in this land. It is Coffee-room, viewed from the inside through a glass door, as it was seen by Dickens on a dark London day; and it was used by Chesterton to denote the queerness of things that have become trite, when they are suddenly seen from a new angle. That kind of fantasy would seem wholesome enough; and it can never lack for material, But it has, I think, only a limited power; for the reason that recovery of freshness of vision is its only virtue... Creative fantasy ... is trying to do something else (make something new ...) (Tolkien, 1980, p. 166).

According to Tolkien scholar John Rateliff, a fourth Chesterton quote in the original St. Andrews's speech was excised when Tolkien edited the essay for publication in *Tree and Leaf* in 1964.

"On Fairy Stories" is longer; 68 paperback pages to "Ethics of Elfland"'s 18. Personal, witty, and entertaining, it is also a model of rhetorical definition, specific, scholarly, and in its epilogue, unequivocally Christian. Tolkien speaks of fantasy writers Sub-creating as God created: The Christian writer "may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose which can be redeemed." (p. 180)

Of the Evangelium, he writes:

I would venture to say that approaching the Christian Story from this direction, it has long been my feeling (a joyous feeling) that God

redeemed the corrupt making creatures, men, in a way fitting to this aspect as to others, of their strange nature. The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces the essence of all fairy stores... The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. The story begins and ends in joy. It has preeminently the "inner consistency of reality". There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits... God is the Lord, of angels, and of men – and of Elves. (Tolkien, 1980, pp. 179-180).

Compare Tolkien's conclusion, above, to the final paragraph of Chesterton's "Ethics":

... I came to feel magic must have a meaning; meaning must have someone to mean it. There was something personal in the world, as in a work of art; whatever it meant it meant it violently... I thought this purpose beautiful in its old design, in spite of its defects, such as dragons ... the proper form of thanks to it is some form of restraint: we should thank God for burgundy and beer by not drinking too much of them. We owed, also, an obedience to whatever made us. And, last and strangest, there had come into my mind a vague and vast impression that in some way all good was a remnant to be stored and held sacred out of some primordial ruin: man had saved his good as Crusoe saved his goods: he saved them from a wreck. All this I felt, and the age had given me no encouragement to feel it. And all this time I had not even thought of Christian theology

(Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 65)

Although Tolkien makes the link between man's sub-creation and the Creator explicit, Chesterton's work perhaps catches the sense, the home truths, of fairy stories in fewer, more memorable words; thus I assign goblets of Chesterton's essay to my fantasy literature students on the first class day to inform early discussion, a function it admirably serves.

The Tolkien essay is assigned a latter course late in the semester, i.e. after the drop date⁴, for by then the students are, so we hope, more experienced readers of and writers about fantasy literature, and

can benefit from that work's longer, deeper look at the subject.

By then, too, students have discovered that Tolkien follows many of Chesterton's mandates for "the ethics and philosophy" of fairy stories:

There is the chivalrous lesson of "Jack The Giant Killer"; that giants should be killed because they are gigantic. It is mainly mutiny against pride as such. For the rebel is older than all the kingdoms... There is the lesson of "Cinderella" which is the same of that as the Magnificat – *exaltavit humiles*. There is the great lesson of "Beauty and the Beast"; that a thing must be loved *before* it is lovable. (Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 50).

The first two of these admonitions – that pride should be given a fall and that the humble shall be exalted – can be seen as realised in all of Tolkien's fiction, from the first – *The Hobbit* and *Farmer Giles of Ham* – to the last *Smith of Wootton Major*. The two are apotheosised in *The Lord of the Rings*, for rarely has literature presented a mightier foe than Sauron or humbler heroes than the hobbits. Adam Schwartz (1966) observes:

[I]t is the humbler, especially the hobbits and/or common people who are preservers of the permanent things grounded in locality and who are the agents of rebellion against imperial pride. Sauron's underestimation of the strength of humble hobbits is what produces his downfall, just as it is the willingness of each London borough to resist Notting Hill's hegemony that ruins its expansionist schema.

The true climax of Tolkien's work, the hobbit rebellion of "The Scouring Of The Shire", especially illustrates how the humble lay low the proud. Indeed, the humblest of all the hobbits, Samwise, is the most exalted by these events.

Tolkien wrote "On Fairy Stories" at a crucial point. *The Hobbit*, a family bedtime story never intended for publication, had been solicited by a publisher's scout sent by Lewis, read and recommended by ten-year-old Rayner Unwin, published by his father's firm, and released to success. Allen & Unwin wanted "a new *Hobbit*". Tolkien had begun it, and in "On Fairy Stories" he wrote a primer for himself to follow. In every way, especially in its illustration of Subcreation, Escape, Recovery, and Consolation, *The Lord of the Rings*

⁴ US College slang: the point, usually 12 weeks into a 16-week semester term, past which students may not withdraw from a class with "W" grade without professional permit.

follows its authors mandates even as it does Chesterton's. He just raises the stakes of *The Hobbit* to the highest level, and a ring becomes The Ring as a fairy story becomes The Fairy Story.

As to Chesterton's social philosophy, Tolkien could be viewed as advocating distributist rebellion in the conclusion of *The Lord of the Rings*. In "The Scouring Of The Shire" a corrupt dictator, the aptly named Sharkey, is the non-local owner of factories that have destroyed the rural agrarian lifestyle and landscapes of the hobbits' homeland. After a relatively unbloody one-battle revolution, he is deposed and destroyed and his tyranny is displaced by a restored rural democracy of hobbits, with the humblest, Sam Gamgee, exalted to the high post of Mayor by election. Thus, true to Chesterton's dictum: "the terribly important things must be left to important men themselves; this is democracy and in this I have always believed." (Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 47). Like the White Horse of Chesterton, the Shire of Tolkien gets its needed scouring.

The Flying Inn is evoked again in the beginning of that chapter, since one of the first sour fruits of the rule of Sharkey is the banning of beer. It seems safe to say that both authors were anti-Prohibitionist as well as democratic; indeed Tolkien likely had less faith in democracy (if not beer) than Chesterton did. But yet his work ends with the common folk's triumph, Chesterton's with their downfall.

David Doughan points out that

"Notting Hill is about politics but in all of Tolkien's work politics occupies at best a secondary role. Tolkien was pretty cool toward political systems in general, and considered any attempts to create an ideal system to be akin to creating God's Kingdom on Earth, and thus doomed from the outset." (1996)

The world of Notting Hill seems far more fallen than that of the Shire because it is: a local populist democracy has become imperialist.

But the essential point is the Happy Ending so sacred to fairy stories.

In the Shire, most live happily ever after.

In Notting Hill, they do not.

I first read Tolkien over twenty years ago and have re-read many of his works regularly, blessed as I am with a necessary opportunity to review them

every fall when I teach a public college course on the author.

But Chesterton wrote so much more, and I have read so much less, as doubtless is evident. I first read *Napoleon of Notting Hill* in 1984, the year of its setting. As it happened, I was then sweating through a touch of the "local rule" fever that is encouraged, both by that book and the "Scouring of the Shire", in a political campaign against an unneeded county airport that was finally rejected – the only such war I've ever won. I remember the home-rule sentiments of Chesterton's tale appealed to me then.

But re-reading it was disappointing. Rather like Tolkien, this second reading "convinced me that it is not as good as I thought." The story is incredible, and that is no compliment. By the time the oak tree episode in the last battle is reached, willing suspension of disbelief is no longer possible. It skips about, especially at first. Characters come and go and come again, more disagreeable than agreeable ones. The two protagonists are hard to like because of their extremes, one of fanaticism, one of cynicism.

Though it certainly fulfils the first three of its author's dicta in "Ethics of Elfland", it is not in fact a fairy tale: there is no magic, no elves or dwarves or dragons or necromancers. Adam Waynes's climatic uprooting of the oak is not magical, merely unbelievable.

The story is a futurist fantasy, rather, where the future has become like the medieval past. One fairy-tale element it has: commoners become kings. But there is no dragon to be destroyed or princess to be rescued, only a crown arbitrarily proffered.

Not a single woman appears in the book, as indeed there are none in *The Hobbit*. *The Lord of the Rings* is mostly male, yet memorable female characters like Goldberry, Arwen, Galadriel Éowyn and Rose Cotton play important roles.⁵

Furthermore, in *The Hobbit*, the male relationships are mostly of schoolboy camaraderies, rivalries, and acceptance, as Bilbo goes from outsider to group leader in a parable any schoolboy would love.

But Chesterton's tale is the playground at its fiercest; the antagonism, the senseless fighting, the cynical mockery that all good children deplore.

As for *The Lord of the Rings*, it is a fairy tale for

⁵An illuminating summary and commentary of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* can be found in Chapter 5, "Mapping the Artistic Terrain: 1907-1907", pp. 54-74 in *G. K. Chesterton: explorations in allegory* by Lynette Hunter, St. Martin's, New York, 1979.

grownups, so of course romantic love of the noblest and the meekest natures animates it as it so often animates the lives of real grown-up men and women, the Sams and Roses of the world no less than the Aragorns and Arwens.

Instead, in Chesterton the warmth of man's blood is wasted, running in the gutters of Notting Hill. The tale is very violent, seemingly more so because the "villains who are victims have names like "Wilson of Bayswater" rather than "Grishnákh". The ending is tragic and sad, and the Happy Ending may be, as Tolkien writes in one of his essays, one of the most hallowed and important elements of the fairy story.

More trivially, the chronology is confusing. When Auberon dashes Adam Wayne's ideals in their mutual death scene by admitting that his creation of the many cities in one London was "a vulgar practical joke on an honest gentleman, a vulgar practical joke that has lasted twenty years" (p. 160), a backward glance at pages 45 and 139 suggests thirty to be the correct number.

Conversely, Tolkien was obsessed with such details and spent much time revising so as to keep moon-rise in phase and weather and even one stray sunbeam consonant in three different stories as he drove the trifurcated narrative of *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King's* first thirteen chapters forward. Without judging, it is fair to note that Tolkien had a greater – indeed, a niggling – attention to consistent detail than Chesterton.

But comparing these two books is unfair: *The Lord of the Rings*, as most if not all of Tolkien's readers would agree, is his finest work. If a ballot asking Chestertonians to name the single best Chesterton opus were to be polled, I daresay *Napoleon* would get some but not the most votes.

Still there is much to admire and also sentiments Tolkien may have shared. When Adam Wayne cries out, "What is sacred if a man's youth is not sacred?" (p. 60) it suggests a Tolkien motive, for the Shire his hobbits dwell in is the English midlands where the author dwelt after moving from South Africa with his mother at the age of four until going up to Oxford at 19.

As to Notting Hill, my wife Jo and I made a pilgrimage there in May, 1996. Charles Noad of the Tolkien Society met us at the Tube station and took us to Pembridge Square, pointing out where the mythical Pump Street would have been before adjourning to a nearby pub, The Slug and Lettuce, for a Northfarthing Smial innmoot. Even now there is a

palpable neighbourhood feel to Notting Hill, though any would-be young Adam Waynes would likely be packing carbon steel, not wooden blades.

Like *Peter Pan*, which had its stage debut late in the same year, 1904, *Napoleon of Notting Hill* begins with a cocky boy at swordpoint with a grown-up. Unlike Capt. Hook, Auberon Quin is delighted and sets in motion a train of events which leads to consequences both good and bad that follows.

There is vivid visual description, especially the catalogue of the courtly garments and pomp and circumstance in Chapter II. But that pomp is punctured and the circumstance shattered by the fuming, angry men trapped inside those robes, who think the raiment silly and "hot as hell". Compare this to the coronation scene in "The Steward and The King", where the pageantry is taken more seriously but perhaps described less well.

In Tolkien, moral ambiguity is rare: good is good and evil is evil.

More complex and troublesome are the events described in "The Great Army of South Kensington" where King Auberon, as Pinker, leads the villains – Barber, Buck, and all – against the seeming hero, Adam Wayne. As exasperatingly, Auberon allies with Wayne at the story's end, the equally disturbing conclusion of "The Last Battle". What was once a just cause is now an unjust cause, but yet Adam leads the forces of Notting Hill on what he believes is the wrong path because it is their will to be so led. And his King joins him.

Though the Marquette manuscripts show that Tolkien added a few more bodies to the dead (of Men, from 20 to 50 to 70; of Hobbits, 11 to 19) and wounded (of Hobbits, 20 to 30) in "The Scouring Of The Shire" with each revision, the Battle of Bywater is nothing like the bloodstorm at Notting Hill. At the end, Adam's sword is broken in a foe's body: "Nothing was left of him but a wreck; but the blade that had broken him was broken. In dying he snapped the great sword and the spell of it; the sword of Wayne was broken at the hilt" (p. 155).

In crucial contrast, the re-forging of the sword of Aragorn at Rivendell precedes the quest that ends in his triumph. This story ends with sword, realm, provost and king destroyed. It is a tribute to Chesterton that this ending is unsatisfactory: he gives us a cause and characters who embrace it and at the end, he crumples cause and characters and casts them away like an empty fish-and-chip paper. He first makes us care; he then breaks our hearts.

So do many great writers, bless them all. So does Tolkien. One of the most poignant scenes in *The Lord of the Rings* is found not in the text, but rather at the end of Appendix A. v, telling of the love story of Aragorn and Arwen, which preexists the story, through their deaths long afterwards. Six-score years after the heroic events that defeat the Enemy and restore Aragorn as King, old age finally claims him at 207; he was a remarkably spry (one could say Paul Newmanesque) 87 years old during the Fellowship's quest. Now he must bid farewell to his Queen Arwen who thus at last, elf that she is, understands death. She says:

"For if this is indeed, as the Eldar say, the gift of the One to Men, it is bitter to receive."

"So it seems," he said. "But let us not be overthrown at the final test, who of old renounced the Shadow and the Ring. In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory. Farewell!"

"Estel! Estel!" she cried, and with that even as he took her hand and kissed it, he fell into sleep."

(Tolkien, 1965b, p. 348)

Clyde Kilby, of Wheaton College's Wade Collection, said that Tolkien told him in 1966 that he disliked the idea that Sam was the true hero of the tale: Aragorn was, Tolkien insisted.

Just before the final banquet at the 1983 Marquette Tolkien conference that was my last meeting with Prof. Kilby, Darrel Martin uttered a line that was an in-pub epiphany: "Aragorn was the son King Arthur should have had." Arathorn was indeed Aragorn's father name, close enough to hint at the relation. The story of Arthur and the story of Notting Hill are chronicles of great kingdoms built on grand concepts: The Table Round and the Neighbourhood. Both kingdoms finally fail. There are no survivors.

Tolkien thought the King Arthur story imperfect, as indeed it is, for it lacks a happy ending: a bloody Good Friday with no Easter. So he perfected it as the Aragorn part of the grand whole of *The Lord of the Rings*. We can not assume that he even read *Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Yet "The Scouring of the Shire" perfects Chesterton's imperfect version of the idea of loving one's home turf enough to fight – even die – for it.

All writing grows from the leaf-mould of the mind, Tolkien said. Chesterton's vast forest shed some leaves into that mould. What grew out of it is one of modern English literature's greatest trees.

By giving these defining English myths of the Table Round and The Neighbourhood happier, if not completely happy, endings, with Sauron and Sharkey defeated instead of Lancelot and Arthur or Adam and Auberon dead, J.R.R. Tolkien wrote a happy ending to England's finest fairy tale.

Perhaps G.K. Chesterton helped him see how it should be done.

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